

June 29, 2013

Fellow Greek Sisters and Brothers,

As many of you already know, this has been a very serious year for Greek Life at SUNY Potsdam. As dedicated Alumni who valued our Greek experience while at Potsdam, we remain committed to our Alma Mater and the future of its Greek Houses. That is why we feel it is important to reach out to as many Greek Alumni as possible and let you know why the current situation is so urgent. We ask for your involvement in shaping the future of Greek Life at our Alma Mater NOW so that future generations of SUNY Potsdam students will have the same opportunity to experience Greek Life as we did but without the current safety concerns.

**Background information:** There have been an alarming number of very serious incidents and repeat charges against Greek organizations over the past ten years at SUNY Potsdam, including hazing and underage drinking violations. The President's Council appointed a Greek Life Task Force in March to assess Greek Life to determine whether it would continue to have a place at SUNY Potsdam.

Thanks in part to the involvement of Greek alumni, the Task Force recommended that Greek letter organizations DO have a place in the life of the College. That is a relief because the Task Force could have recommended to ban all Greek organizations—just based on recent hazing and drinking violations alone! However, the Task Force also said that Greek organizations must undergo significant and sustainable reforms to protect the safety of students. To make this happen, BOTH Greek Alumni and the College must work together.

**What we have learned so far:** Unfortunately, the facts speak for themselves. We want to share with you some of the things that we learned over the past six months.

1. Hazing today is completely different from the pledging we remember. AND HAZING IS ALSO NOW AGAINST THE LAW IN NEW YORK STATE. We recall wearing hats and singing pledge songs as part of the tradition of becoming a full-fledged Greek member. Today, anything that can be considered as demeaning can also be construed as hazing-- even if a pledge is willing to do it. There is heightened sensitivity to all the activities that pledges (now referred to as "new members") are asked to do.

Unfortunately, hazing activities have gone way beyond people feeling demeaned by wearing pledge hats and singing songs. When we asked the College about the specific nature of some of the hazing charges, we were alarmed to find practices that put students at risk of being harmed or harming others.

2. Today, underage drinking is against the law in New York State for all students under the age of 21. This is a very different world from what many

of us experienced when the drinking age was 18. Because it IS the law, the College has to have a strict no-tolerance policy on underage drinking.

3. These trends are not unique to Potsdam. Nationally, there has been a rise in disturbing hazing practices, which have sometimes tragically resulted in injury, emotional/mental harm and even death. A quick search of headlines across the country is sobering and puts this issue into perspective.

Potsdam cannot wait for tragedy to strike before dealing proactively with these behaviors. Students have ended up in the hospital with alcohol poisoning that could have had tragic effects. Other students have had nervous breakdowns based on the hazing they received in their pledge program. Again, this is not unique to Potsdam. But how would you feel if your daughter/son were on the receiving end of one of these hazing practices?

4. Each Greek House has a unique history related to violations and charges. Some Houses are in very good standing with few or no violations at all, whereas others are in the process of receiving severe penalties and lengthy suspensions. And as you may know, several Greek Houses have already been permanently banned in the past 10 years due to repeat hazing and underage drinking charges.

We can learn from each other—particularly from the Houses that have remained in good standing. And all Greek Alumni organizations need by laws, rules and regulations that are in sync with the College’s Student Code of Ethics—something that a few of us discovered recently.

5. The College has agreed that there is work to be done on its part to improve relationships with Greek organizations. The College must partner with students, alumni, faculty and community members to identify a workable strategy moving forward.

**Next steps to ensure the future:** SUNY Potsdam has confirmed a commitment to Greek Life into the future, ***but only*** if serious reforms are implemented to align the Greek experience with the core values and mission of the College. The Greek Life Task Force has been charged with continuing to assess strategies that will significantly reform dangerous practices while preserving the Greek Life traditions of each organization. This will strengthen the SUNY Potsdam experience for all students, but they need our help to do this.

For this change to come about, we will need a core group of Alumni from each House who are willing to work with their Student Actives. This guidance is needed to ensure that the Actives make the necessary changes to their programs.

Here are some things that we would suggest you consider doing to help:

(1) Get educated on the facts. Ask the Alumni Association President of your Greek Organization to contact the Student Affairs Office to see if your Greek House has a history of hazing and underage drinking violations. If so, review the facts. We were very surprised to learn what has actually gone on in some organizations—in stark contrast to what the Actives had been saying.

If you are coming to the 2013 Alumni Reunion Weekend (July 11-14), you can sign up for the Greek Alumni discussion/box lunch being held @ noon in Kellas Hall on Saturday, July 13<sup>th</sup>. Alan Hersker, Chair of the Greek Life Task Force, and Julie Dold, Assistant Director of Campus Life, will be there to answer questions. (Please contact the Alumni Relations Office to sign up for this event at 315-267-2120 or @ [www.potsdam.edu/alumni](http://www.potsdam.edu/alumni)).

(2) Get more involved with your Student Actives if you are not doing that already. Work with your Alumni Association Officers; if your House does not have one in place, consider forming one to oversee these changes. Make sure that they, in turn, are working proactively with the Student Affairs group, particularly Julie Dold, mentioned above, who has responsibility for Greek organizations.

(3) Consider donating a little extra money this year to help the mission of the Greek Life Task Force. They don't have a budget to assist them in their task. With funds, they will be able to visit campuses with successful Greek programs in place. Some of us are giving extra dollars to the College earmarked for the Greek Life Task Force, in addition to our annual donation. If you are so inclined, checks may be made out to the Potsdam College Foundation for this purpose.

Thank you for "listening." We hope we can all work together to ensure the future of Greek Life at SUNY Potsdam.

Sincerely,

Lynne Boles, SUNY '74, Ago,

Belinda Colesanti, Clarkson '88, Omega

Debbie Diefendorf Hind, SUNY '75, Ago

Gary Hind, SUNY '77, DK

Kathryn Horan, SUNY '09, AST

Steve Immerman, SUNY '75, DK

Ed Marschilok, SUNY '74, DK

Jane Morale, SUNY '80, Ago

Mike Paestella, SUNY '95, Prometheus

Donnalyn Shuster, SUNY '78, Omega

Susan Young, Clarkson '89, Ago

Jeff Washburn, SUNY '79, Psi Phi Delta

